Mesopotamia ميسوبوتاميا

Issue 5 **September 2007**

Iraqi Christians were promised freedom?

By The Editor

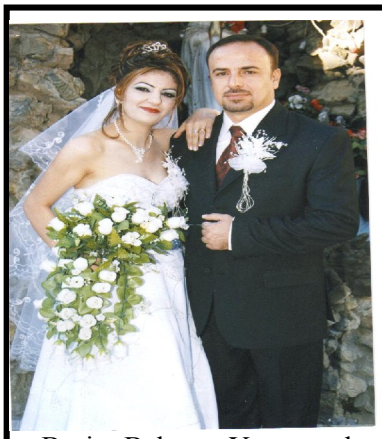
Iraq has become a wounded country. The situation for Christians is tragic. They were promised freedom, but until today nothing positive has emerged for them. Terrorists attack the cornerstone people (the high educated). Still Christians have been forced to leave their homes or killed. Some have been threaten, kidnapped, killed. United Nation said that 1.2 million people have fled the country in 2007.

Christians are afraid of praying in the churches. However, Iraqi Christian leaders try to encourage people to overcome the difficulties. In time no force is able to run the country properly. Christians today are looking for freedom to practice their faith, freedom from fear, to work, travel.

Priests from Baghdad, in spite of all that is happening, are showing their optimism in words and deeds encouraging their people and helping them in every way they can. They look forward to support from churches outside Iraq through prayers and help from Coalition Forces to carry out their promises. Do they remember the Good Samaritan?

Iraqi Christians Martyrs (part 3)

Loe Sulaiman Numan, was shot dead in Mosul in 27 June 2007



Basim Behnam Younan, the Iraqi youth team trainer. Was killed in Baghdad in 1/9/07

Zuhair Yousif Estefo, was shot dead in Mosul in 27 June 2007

Mattheo Shamon Putros, was killed in Mosul in 27/09/07

Ramzy Yacob Ilias Shamasha and Ismael Izaria Namoo were kidnapped and killed in Baghdad in

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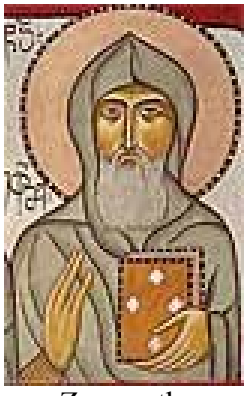
Isaac Hermiz Isho, was killed in Baghdad in 29/01/07

Mikhael Siros, was killed in 30/01/05

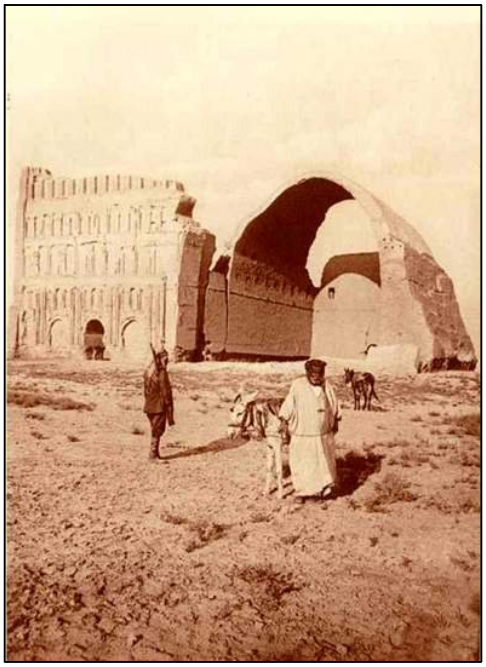
PATRIARCH BABOYE 5th Century

Baboye was one of the famous Patriarchs of the Church of the East. He was born in Iraq (south of Baghdad) in the 5th century. His family was pagan.



Zenon, the emperor of Bvzantium

He studied philosophy and sciences, and was converted to Christianity by a monk from the monastery of *Mar Abda.* Then, he dedicated himself to become religious a priest. After that, he was elected as Patriarch of the Church of the East in 457. He served as patriarch for twenty seven years until 484.



His period was marked with the brutality of Fairouz, the Sasanian King; Baboye was imprisoned for two years. In 464 and as a result of the peace treaty between the Romans and the Persians he was released from prison carrying out marks of torture engraved on his body and full of pride of his faith. But he moved slowly in the application of regulations of the Easter Church. His life was ended tragically. That was discovered by a letter sent from him to Zenon, the emperor of Byzantium.

The letter talked about the condition of Christians in the East. He was arrested by the emperor's spies outside *Mada'in* (today *Salman Pack*, east of Baghdad) and died as a martyr in the summer of 484. He was buried in *al-Hera* city (today *al-Koufa*, south of Babylon).

The Editor

Poem by St. Ephrem (4th Century)

You are the enriching treasure, who came to satisfy the needy,
And the spring that quenches the thirst of simple people,
And the name that expelled the falsehood from the world.

Blessed are those who recognized who you are Oh Christ,
And in possessing you became possessed by you.

You are the glorious wheat cob that grew amongst the hateful darnels,
You gave the bread of life untiringly to the hungry.
You broke the curse associated with Adam, who obtained his bread with pain and sweat.
Happy is the one who eat your blessed bread

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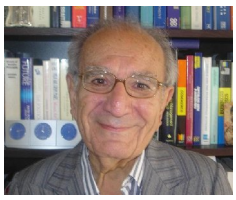
Post-Mesopotamian History (Pre-Christian Era) (4)

By Farid Oufi



In the work of Syriac writers it is demonstrated that the longevity of ancient beliefs in deities such as Sin and Nebo continued well into the Christian era alongside native Syrian and imported Hellenistic cults. In literary work, it was even clearer. Dialogue poetry, taking the form of dispute, usually in poetic form, which takes place between two or more protagonists, survived from Assyrian and Babylonian culture and re-emerged in later literature, sometimes even influencing European writings.

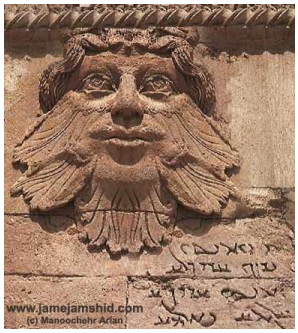
St Ephram

A Syriac form called the *drasha* or dispute poem was used centuries later by St Ephram for disputes between Death and Satan, between Death and Man and between Virginity and Abstinence in marriage. Another form called *soghitha* which has some narrative elements with dramatic but always adversative dialogue. Often there are tragic overtones, as in the dialogue between Cain and Abel. There are also dialogues between the Church and Synagogue, between Body and Soul and even between the theological opponents *Nestorius* and Cyril of Alexandria, a debate which is a fictional as the rest[i].

Babylonia was much more influenced by Hellenism. Seleucia which the Greeks built on the Tigris river, flourished about 150 BC. In the first century AD, Seleucia had not lapsed into the barbarous usages of the Parthians, but still retained the institutions of the Greek ruler Seleucus[ii]. Three hundred citizens, chosen for their wealth or wisdom, compose as it were a Senate; the populace too have their share of power. Throughout Mesopotamia, while Greek became the language of literature and culture, and remained so until the Arab Muslim conquest, the Greek religion did not reach the stage as that already reached by the religions of the land. It is usual to say that the Greeks were saved from a religion of the Oriental type by their having no priesthood; but this is to mistake the effect for the cause. Priesthoods do not make dogmas, though they preserve them once they are made; and in the earlier stages of their development, the Oriental peoples had no priesthoods either in the sense intended. It was not so much the absence of priesthood as the existence of the scientific schools that saved Greece[iii]. The Hellenistic culture imposed on the land since its conquest by Alexander (332 BC) was only skin-deep and limited to the urban population. The rural people remained ever conscious of cultural and racial differences between themselves and their masters[iv].

In 126 BC, the Zoroastrian Persians returned to Mesopotamia under the Parthian dynasty[v]. They created a new condition by began to open routes to Palmyra in and spread their cultural elements but could not compete with the Hellenistic civilization which set foot deeper over there. The *Parithian* period lasted until 227 and witnessed the dawn of a new faith, Christianity.

The Zoroastrian religion of the Persians had insignificant impact on the people of Mesopotamia. Deities such as Sin and Nebo continued to be worshiped well into the Christian era, alongside native Syrian and imported Hellenistic cults. Astrology and astronomy were particularly influential, perpetuated in worship as at *Sumatar Harabesi* and employed as a science by the Jews[vi]. The influence of ancient traditions also persisted, modified by translation and new use, for the cult and oracles of Bel at Palmyra, Ishtar at *Arbela*, *Ashur-bel* at *Ashur*, *Shamash-Bel* at *Hatra* and Sin at *Harran,* ensured that interest in Chaldean traditions continued over a wide area.



The Hatra god

The Babylonians and Assyrians saw man's role as a finely balanced, unremitting task to maintain the established order and keep chaos at bay. Hence, the king annually defeats the powers of chaos at the New Year festival while an Epic of

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Creation is recited. He takes the hands of the champion deity *Bel-Marduk* in Babylon or the moon-god Sin in *Harran* and assumed personal responsibility for maintaining the balance between good and evil, order and chaos. In this way ancient Mesopotamian beliefs embodied a fundamental dualism, not so very different from the Persian beliefs to which the name of the ancient prophet Zoroaster was attached[vii].

(To be continued)

Saint Isaac from Nineveh Commentary: Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint Mark 9,14-29. "I believe; help my unbelief!"

Faith is the gateway to the mysteries

Saint Isaac the Syrian (7th century), Monk in Nineveh, near Mosul in present-day Iraq) Ascetic Discourses, 1st series, 72 (translated from the French: Touraille, DDB 1981, p. 365)

Faith is the gateway to the mysteries. What the eyes of the body are for palpable things, faith is for the hidden eyes of the soul. The Fathers say that just as our body has two eyes, so our soul has two spiritual eyes, and each one has its own vision. Through one eye, we see the secrets of God's glory hidden in the beings of God's creation, which is to say, God's power, his wisdom, and his eternal providence, which surrounds us and which we understand when we consider the greatness of the heights to which God leads us. With that same eye, we also contemplate the celestial orders, the angels, our companions and fellow servants (Rev 22:9).

And with the other eye we contemplate the glory of God's holiness, when he wants to make us enter into his spiritual mysteries and when he opens up the ocean of faith to our intelligence.
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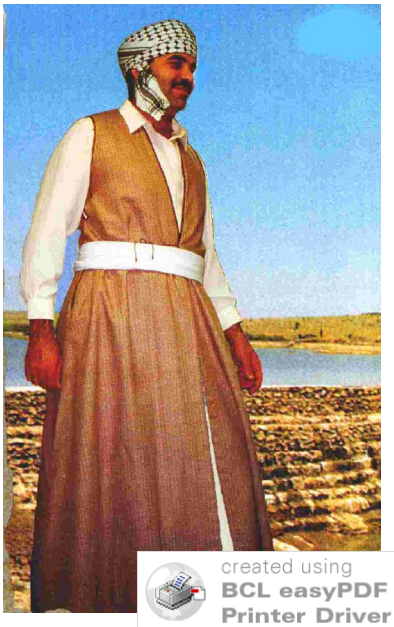
Tel Keppe, which means the Stone hill, is a Christian town 13km north of Mosul (Nineveh) in northern Iraq. Presently, only 1000 Christians families live in it, while 20000 families live in Baghdad and especially in the United States of America. Unfortunately, as other Christians in Iraq, they have been forced to leave Iraq as a result of the persecution. *Telkeppe* was mentioned in the fifth Century BC, currently, there are 5 Churches. Across history, It was attacked by the Mongols (1436 and 1508), Persians (in 1743), and the Kurds (in 1833).

Photos from the internet



An Iraqi Christian (Chaldean Man) wearing a traditional custom from *Tel keppe* north of Mosul (5km).

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The Chaldean Catholic Church (part 1)

Accessed from Dr Suha Rassam's book (Christianity in Iraq/Chap. 7)

The first bishop to be consecrated for the Chaldean Church was John Solaka in 1553.
This Church emerged as a result of union of some members of the Church of the East with the Roman Catholic Church. However, relations with Rome continue to fluctuate until the nineteenth century when Pope Pius VIII confirmed John Hormiz as **'The Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans'** and since then relations have been stable**.** The seat of the Patriarchate moved among several places over the centuries until it settled in Mosul in 1830. It was moved to Baghdad in 1950 by Patriarch *Yusif Ghanima* in view of the mounting importance of the capital and the increase in the number of Christians living in it.

Patriarch Ghanima was followed by *Poulis Skeikho* in 1958, a time of political upheaval for all Iraqis as it coincided with the overthrow of the Monarchy. Patriarch Sheikho had to deal with the question of military service for the priests, the nationalisation of the schools and the displacement of the Christians from the north after the Kurdish movements. He also introduced seminary reforms and ordered the construction of twenty five churches in Baghdad to serve the increasing Chaldean community in the capital.

In 1989, Rafael I Bidawid became Patriarch who spent twenty three years as head of the Chaldean Church. After the Gulf War, he founded *'Akhwiyat al-Mahabba' or Caritas Iraq,* an organisation that helped all Iraqis, Muslims and Christians of all denominations, during the long years of sanctions. He obtained an official permission from the Iraqi government for publication of *Najm al-Mashriq*, an important quarterly religious magazine, and established 'Babylon College for Philosophy and Theology'. He was also founder of the 'Council of Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops' in Lebanon, of the 'Council of Catholic Bishops of Iraq', and the 'Council of Christians of Iraq'. He represented the Catholic Church in the fourth General Assembly of the Council of Churches of the Middle East in Cyprus and advocated that the Catholic Church become a member of this Council. He died in Beirut on the 7th of July 2003.

After Bidawid's death, the College of Bishops of the

THE CHALDEAN PATRIARCHS OF BABYLON
MAR RAPHAEL I BIDAWID 1989-2003
MAR YOHANAN SOULAQA 1553-1555
MAR PAULS II CHEIKHO 1958-1989
MAR ABDISHO IV MARGUN 1555-1567
His Beatitude Mar Emmanuel III Delly Chaldean Patriarch of Babylon 2003
MAR YOUSEF VII GHANIMA 1947-1958
MAR YOUSEF II MAROUF 1696-1712
MAR EMMANUEL II TOMA 1900-1947
MAR ABDISHO V. KHAYYAT 1894-1899
MAR ELIYA XIV ABBO-ALYONAN 1879-1894
MAR YOUSEF VI AUDO 1847-1878
MAR NICOLAWOS ZAYA 1838-1847
MAR YOUHANAN VIII HORMEZD 1830-1838

Chaldean Church elected Bishop Emmanuel III Deli as Patriarch on the third of Dec 2003. He is presently helped by three assistant bishops, one responsible for cultural and educational affairs, the second for pastoral matters and the third for international relations. He has eighteen other bishops under his jurisdiction, who together with about one hundred and thirty priests run the various bishoprics.

In Iraq there is one bishop for each of the cities of Erbil, Zakho, Amadiya, Basrah, and two for each of Mosul, Alqosh and Kirkuk (two of whom are retired). Outside Iraq there is one bishop for each of Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Iran, Turkey, and Canada and two for the United States of America (a total of 19 bishops apart from the Patriarch).
Pastoral centres served by a priest include: the United Kingdom, France, Holland, Denmark, Italy, Germany, Greece, Sweden, Georgia and Jordan.

The Chaldean Church claims the largest number of believers in Iraq, about 75% of all Christians,

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estimated at about half a million. The majority live in the capital city Baghdad, followed by Mosul, Erbil, Basrah, Duhok and Kirkuk. A small number of families live in each of Hilla, Imara, Ba'quba and Sulaimaniya. There is an equal number of Chaldean Christians outside Iraq, the biggest community being that of the United States of America to be followed by that of Europe, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia[1].

When union with Rome was cemented in the nineteenth century, the Chaldean Church was given the right of retention of its original rites and traditions. The mass, follows the original East Syrian tradition according to the rite of Mar Addai and Mari. In areas where the community speaks Aramaic, the mass is said in the Eastern Syriac dialect, while in the cities the mass is said in a mixture of Arabic and Aramaic. In recent years it has been translated to English in order to serve the growing number of Chaldean Christians in the United States and other western countries who do not speak the Syriac language

Special to the Chronicle / Delphine Minoui

The start of the new academic year at Babel Catholic College

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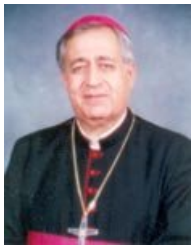

A special Liturgy marked the start of the new academic year at Babel Catholic College of Theology in Ankawa, the only Catholic college for theology in Iraq run by the Chaldean Catholic Patriarchate of Babylon of the Chaldeans. Babel College is affiliated with the Pontifical Urban University in Rome.

[1] Most of the information about the Chaldean Church in this section are obtained from the Iraqi Chaldean priest who serve the Christian community in London.

The Eucharistic Celebration, presided by the rector Mgr Jacques Isaac, in the presence of Padre *Rayan Atto*, parish priest at *Mar Qardagh*, in Erbil, was held at *Mar Eliya* church, in Ankawa, a town in northern Iraq where the college was moved from Baghdad because of insecurity in the southern Dora of the capital. Also present Chaldean priests from Ankawa, and from d *Al Qosh*, accompanied by the Bishop *Mikha* P. *Maqdassi*, some monks and nuns, representatives of the Kurd Regional government in whose territory Ankawa is situated, Fr *Jibrail*, Superior General of the local community of Chaldean monks and leading civil society members.

"We need optimism and courage", to carry on didactic activities said Mgr Isaac, according to the Chaldean Catholic news bulletin Baghdadhope. "I am optimistic - he said - for the role Babel College has had and will continue to have to form Iraqi clergy. Our task as an ecclesiastical institution is to form Christ's witnesses. This is why I encourage all the bishops to take advantage of Babel College, its teachers and the cultural contribution it offers ".

Sts. Peter and Paul Seminary in Baghdad

1960-2006

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MEMORIES: IN THE VILLAGE OF MAOT/North of Iraq - May 1987

We were stationed, at the bottom of a mountain in the north of Iraq, to defend our borders with Iran, near one of our villages. It was bad. The enemy was at the top of the mountain and we were at the bottom, trying to hide amongst the trees and bushes, during the day, and slip into the small holes. We struggled hard to curve through the stony cemetery of the town, at night so, we managed to go as far as 50 50cm deep, in those holes.

Few days later, the enemy discovered our existence, either, due to the movements of the soldiers, or the reflection of the metal sheets we used to support the sides and edges of our shelters. They started shelling us, with rockets and mortars, from a distance of one and a half kilometers only, aiming at finishing us, as soon as possible.

We decided to take shelter, in our small holes of two meters length and half a meter width. I managed to raise the depth of mine, another 50cm, by adding more sacks of sand and empty ammunition boxes filled with soil.

As usual, during these years of war, my companion was always, the Bible and my rosary. Every time, I come very close to death, I wrap my rosary around my hand, with my holy book.

Rockets started falling all around us, and every where. As it started getting closer, and closer, we realized that the enemy had spotted us clearly.
During this heavy shelling, I was shouting every now and then, to enquire about my colleagues, and if everyone of them was still a live. One of these rockets hit one of our mortars. The sound of the rockets was far beyond our bearing. In fact, the last one, I lost the ability to hear it. For a while, I thought I was finished. The rocket had lifted me in the air, and dropped me in the shelter. The cover went flying; the sacks of sand were blown everywhere. I was covered with soil and dust. Shrapnel were hitting trees, rocks, and the surrounding graves around us. I didn't know whether I was alive or buried, until I heard, the soldiers, calling my name. I answered back, and said, the rocker fell next to me.

I dared to lift my head, and looked around, after I checked my body, and there was the surprise, one of more than 50 surprises, during the war. The rocket was next to my head. I stretched my arm, and it went through the rocket hole. I will never forget this prayer, for Virgin Mary, with her sacred rosary. She saved my life.

Translated by Mrs. N. Yousif

The Sunday Services at the Oriental Churches in London:

- (Chaldean Catholic Mission) at The Holy family Catholic Church, Vale Lane, West Acton, London W3 0DY (12.30 pm) (Tel: 02089976370)
- (Syriac Catholic Mission) at The Holy Trinity Church, 41 Brook Green, Hammersmith, London W6 7BL (1pm) (Mob: 07876424662)
- (Syriac Orthodox Church) at St Andrews Church, Star Road, London W14 (4pm) (Tel: 02086547531)
- (Assyrian Church) at St. Mary Parish, Westminster Road, Hanwell, London W7 3TU (9am) (02085671814)
- (Ancient Church of the East) at St Mary Church Hall, 62 Greenford Avenue, Hanwell, London, W7 4NQ (9 am) 02085676463

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A Sumerian woman feeding her baby

PRAYER FROM THE EASTERN LITURGY
(7th Century)

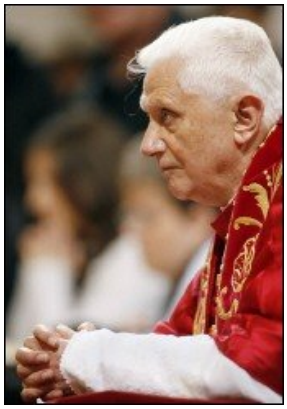
Mercy

Oh Compassion full of mercy,
The merciful who responds with mercy,
To those who repent requesting mercy.
Through you grace full of mercy,
From whom mercy flows,
Have compassion on those who need mercy.
Save them through your mercy,
from the darkness of those who do not have mercy.
Pour upon your flock mercy,
Oh Compassionate who heals by mercy.

Remember Iraq in your Prayers

"Christ challenged evil with his infinite love, he keeps us united and through the Eucharist he gifts us life, which the terrorists are trying to take away" (2007)

Fr. Ragheed Ganni



"that their costly sacrifice would inspire in the hearts of all men and women of good will a renewed resolve to reject the ways of hatred and violence, to conquer evil with good and to cooperate in hastening the dawn of reconciliation, justice and peace in Iraq.

Message from Pope Benedict XVI

+ To have our human rights
+ To provide special security
+ To have the freedom in expressing our believe
+ To rebuilt our Churches, Monasteries and Cultural centres
+ To have our private schools back.

[i] "The Legacy of Mesopotamia" – pp 148-149
[ii] Bertrand Russel, "History of Western Philosophy" – p 233
[iii] Ibid – p 43
[iv] Philip Hitti, "History of the Arabs" – p 153
[v] Spelled also "Parthean"
[vi] "The Legacy of Mesopotamia", see Alison Salvesen – p 158
[vii] Stephanie Dalley – p 163

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